

Bill Includes Funding for County Payments

WASHINGTON, DC- Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) said today, "The house made progress toward America's energy independence with the passage of H.R. 6, also known as the Energy Bill." This historic legislation will increase American energy independence, strengthen national security, lower energy costs, contribute to the growth of the economy, and reduce global warming.

Perhaps even more significant for Southwest Oregon, the legislation also includes important funding for the county payments program.

"We can't import, dig, drill and burn our way to long term energy security," DeFazio said. "This legislation puts America on a new path to energy independence and sustainability with less reliance on foreign oil. The bill will be great for American consumers by saving them billions at the pump."

The clean energy technologies in the legislation will create jobs, benefit the economy and combat global warming," DeFazio continued.

"President Bush and the Republicans dropped the ball on sustainable energy policy but the Democratic Congress is passing common sense energy solutions today."

The legislation sets new efficiency standards for a wide range of products and requires that 15 percent of our electricity come from renewable sources by 2010. The bill increases vehicle fuel efficiency standards for the first time in 32 years.

The bill also includes important tax incentives for renewable energy, conservation and efficiency measures.

Finally, these investments will be fully paid for by repealing tax breaks for profit-rich oil companies.

But perhaps more important to the people of Southwest Oregon, the energy bill includes a plan to continue funding for the critical county payments program for the next four years.

This funding was made possible when DeFazio succeeded in getting a provision included in the House Energy bill earlier this summer.

Since the Senate Energy bill did not contain any reference to the county payments program, DeFazio's provision opened the door for conferees to include a multi-year reauthorization in the final energy legislation when conferees reconciled the differences between the two bills.

The bill will ramp-down the program over the next four years.

"The county payments program provides funding for vital services like law enforcement, county road departments, and rural schools," DeFazio said.

"Rural counties have been struggling to stay afloat since Republicans allowed the program to expire last fall.

This is not the bill I had hoped for, but a ramp down in payments is certainly better than the prospect of zero funding the next year.

This reauthorization will provide counties with predictable, if inadequate, funding, and I'll continue to work on my thinning legislation and other policies to help restore critical funding to our rural counties."

Unfortunately, the potential for passage of the bill is less certain in the Senate where Republicans are threatening to filibuster the bill.

Additionally, President Bush has threatened to veto the legislation.

"No matter the ultimate fate of the Energy bill, I will fight for continued funding of the county payments program," DeFazio said.